

NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Forests and Range

NEW LAW IN FORCE TO PREVENT ECOSYSTEM DAMAGE

VICTORIA – Effective immediately, people who cause environmental damage to public forest and range lands through recreational activities such as mudboggging will be subject to financial penalties and prosecution, Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman announced today.

"I hope this new legislation will stop people from harming the environment by mudboggging or recklessly driving ATVs through sensitive alpine terrain and range lands," said Coleman. "We want to encourage the public to act responsibly on Crown land when they go out and enjoy the great outdoors."

On May 31, the Forests and Range Statutes Amendment Act received royal assent. The act introduced a provision that makes it illegal for individuals to cause environmental damage. Previously, only industrial users of Crown land were subject to these prohibitions. Regulations deposited this week bring the law into effect, and update the definition of environmental damage to include any change to soil that adversely alters an ecosystem.

Under the new provision, individuals found to have caused environmental damage may face penalties of up to \$100,000. Criminal convictions carry maximum fines of \$100,000, up to one year in jail, or both.

"As a long-time proponent of off-road vehicle management, I strongly support any steps toward increased protection of B.C.'s grasslands, alpine and riparian areas," said East Kootenay MLA and BC Outdoor Caucus Chair Bill Bennett. "Our public land in B.C. is an incredible resource, and although I support motorized recreation and enjoy it myself, we must balance motorized recreation with other values. There is room for everyone out there if we use common sense."

Irresponsible use of off-road vehicles in ecosystems can easily damage soil, the ecological foundation of natural areas. For example, repeatedly driving or driving at certain times of the year in wetlands can change the structure of the soil, making it difficult for plants to take root and grow because of a lack of air or nutrients. In addition, off-roading in wetlands kills birds and amphibians. Generations of wildlife can be impacted due to a lack of plant life and clean water.

In fragile alpine areas and dry grasslands, off-roading can quickly erode the thin soil layer so that plant life can no longer be sustained.

An information brochure, titled "Is your mud worth \$100,000 and a year in jail?" is available online at: www.for.gov.bc.ca/hen/reports/index.htm. For photos illustrating damage to ecosystems caused by off-road vehicles, please see www.for.gov.bc.ca/pab/media.

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The public is encouraged to use public forest and range lands responsibly. Report any suspected forestry contraventions or crimes to a local Ministry of Forests and Range office, or call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477.

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